



**THOMAS L. GARTHWAITE, M.D.**  
Director and Chief Medical Officer

**FRED LEAF**  
Chief Operating Officer

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES  
313 N. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012  
(213) 240-8101

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October 25, 2002

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.   
Director and Chief Medical Officer

SUBJECT: **SYPHILIS AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN**

On April 15, 2002 the Department of Health Services provided the Board with an update report on syphilis among men who have sex with men (MSM) and on additional efforts being taken to address the endemic level of infection in L.A. County. This memo provides a further update on these efforts.

**UPDATE ON CASES**

A total of 217 early syphilis cases (primary, secondary, and early latent) has been reported among MSMs in 2002 (through August 31). This total is nearly as high as that for the entire year in 2001 (222 MSM cases), and represents an increase of 57% from the 2001 year-to-date (through August 31) total of 138 MSM cases. MSM cases represent 58% of the 375 total early syphilis cases to date in L.A. County in 2002, similar to the 56% of total cases in 2001. At least 57% of MSM early syphilis cases in 2002 have been HIV-positive, similar to at least 55% of MSM cases in 2001. Attachment I shows L.A. County totals for all early syphilis cases, and for primary and secondary (i.e., symptomatic) syphilis cases, for both the overall population and for MSM, by month of diagnosis, and by Health District and SPA of residence, through August 23, 2002.

**CURRENT EFFORTS**

The following activities already in place prior to April 15, 2002 have continued:

STD Program screening in the K-11 Unit (a unit exclusively housing MSM) in the Men's Central Jail. Through April 2002, screening in K-11 resulted in 218 syphilis tests, identifying no new cases. In the same period, 251 HIV tests were given, identifying 23 cases (9.3% prevalence). K-11, though a major source of case syphilis detection in 2000, has seen no new recent infections, perhaps due to on-going screening of the jail population.

STD Program screening in community venues using the Mobile Clinic Unit (a mobile van). Between March 24 and December 31, 2001, the unit conducted 21 screening events targeting MSM, providing 423 syphilis tests and identifying 3 untreated early syphilis cases (0.7% prevalence).

HIV Epidemiology Program testing in two bathhouses. HIV Epidemiology continued to conduct screening in one bathhouse through the end of July; screening in a second bathhouse is on-going. Through mid-August, 2002, this effort resulted in 459 tests taken, with 7 new syphilis cases (1.5% prevalence) and 53 HIV cases (11.5% prevalence) detected.

Screening by Adult Industry Medical in collaboration with the STD program at four commercial sex venues. Between February 11, 2001 and July 19, 2002, screening of 491 men resulted in identification of 4 untreated syphilis cases (0.8%) and 13 new HIV infections (2.6% prevalence).

OAPP HIV Prevention contracts with community agencies of \$5 million targeting MSMs.

Since April 15, the following additional efforts have also been initiated:

A contract with AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) for \$66,150 was approved by the Board on April 30, 2002 to provide a prevention advocate and liaison between the Department and the commercial sex venues (bathhouses and sex clubs). The liaison will work with management of these venues, the STD Program, the Syphilis Organizing Committee (SMOC), and other agencies to maximize disease prevention policies, education, training, and health access at or through these venues, and venue coordination with the MSM syphilis prevention media campaign.

An OAPP grant award for \$150,000 to APLA, working in collaboration with the STD Program, Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, and other agencies, to initiate a peer-to-peer program to promote safer sex norms in commercial sex venues. This program will adapt a Popular Opinion Leader (POL) model, used successfully for MSM population in other settings (e.g., bars) to commercial sex venues.

A contract to AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) for \$394,345 was approved by the Board on April 30, 2002 to coordinate and implement a targeted prevention media campaign directed at MSMs. AHF has undertaken this campaign in conjunction with 5 other MSM-serving community agencies, who have formally convened as the Syphilis Media Organizing Committee (SMOC), coordinated by AHF.

The L.A. County media campaign was launched June 20, just prior to the weekend of the Christopher Street West (gay pride) festival in West Hollywood, with a press conference attended by television crews from channels 2, 7, and 11, and covered by articles in FAB and Frontiers magazines. To date, campaign expenditures (including start-up development costs) have totaled \$191,142. Through July, campaign activities have included:

11 print ads in 4 English and 2 Spanish publications (all publications used target MSM except the L.A. Weekly). (A second generation of print ads, which further develop a narrative story featuring Phil, began in August.)

One English and one Spanish billboard (each 14' x 48') in West Hollywood and Hollywood locations.

A mobile billboard (English on one side, Spanish on one side) used during the week of Christopher Street West (6/21 – 6/27).

A campaign website ([www.stopthesores.org](http://www.stopthesores.org)), also linked to the STD Program website, featuring all campaign materials, information about syphilis, and locations of testing resources.

Outreaches at Christopher Street West, Outfest, the Lotus Festival, Sunset Junction, and various venues. At outreaches through July, staff of AHF and the SMOC agencies have distributed approximately 10,000 palm cards (including approximately 3,000 in Spanish), and approximately 15,000 "Phil, the syphilis sore" stress grips, bearing the STD Hotline number and the campaign website url ([www.stopthesores.org](http://www.stopthesores.org)). Many outreaches have also featured an AHF staff member in a life-size "Phil" costume. To aid in the selection of outreach venues, the STD Program has provided lists to agencies performing outreach, identifying key venues named as sources of partner contact in MSM syphilis case interviews. Media campaign materials have also been included as a regular part of AHF's mobile HIV testing van, which operates four times per week, and at AIM's syphilis and HIV testing outreaches at four commercial sex venues.

A brief segment featuring the Los Angeles County and San Francisco syphilis campaigns on the national cable program "The Daily Show," on the Comedy Central cable network. This segment aired 7/23/02 and remains available for viewing on the Comedy Central website.

Planning by the STD program and AHF to develop and implement campaign evaluation activities.

On-going efforts of the Latino Syphilis Working Group, a collaborative of four agencies serving Latino MSM, which originally formed at the end of 2001. The Working Group, co-facilitated by an STD Program staff member, has helped promote syphilis education outreaches by member agencies (both separately and jointly) targeting Latino MSM at key venues identified by the STD Program, and sponsored trainings (provided by the STD Program) on syphilis for agency outreach staff.

Of three vacant positions reassigned to the STD Program, two have been filled. The STD program was also allocated four new positions from the Public Health reinvestment, a part of the March 19, 2002 Strategic Plan status report.

I will provide a further update by January 31, 2003. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.

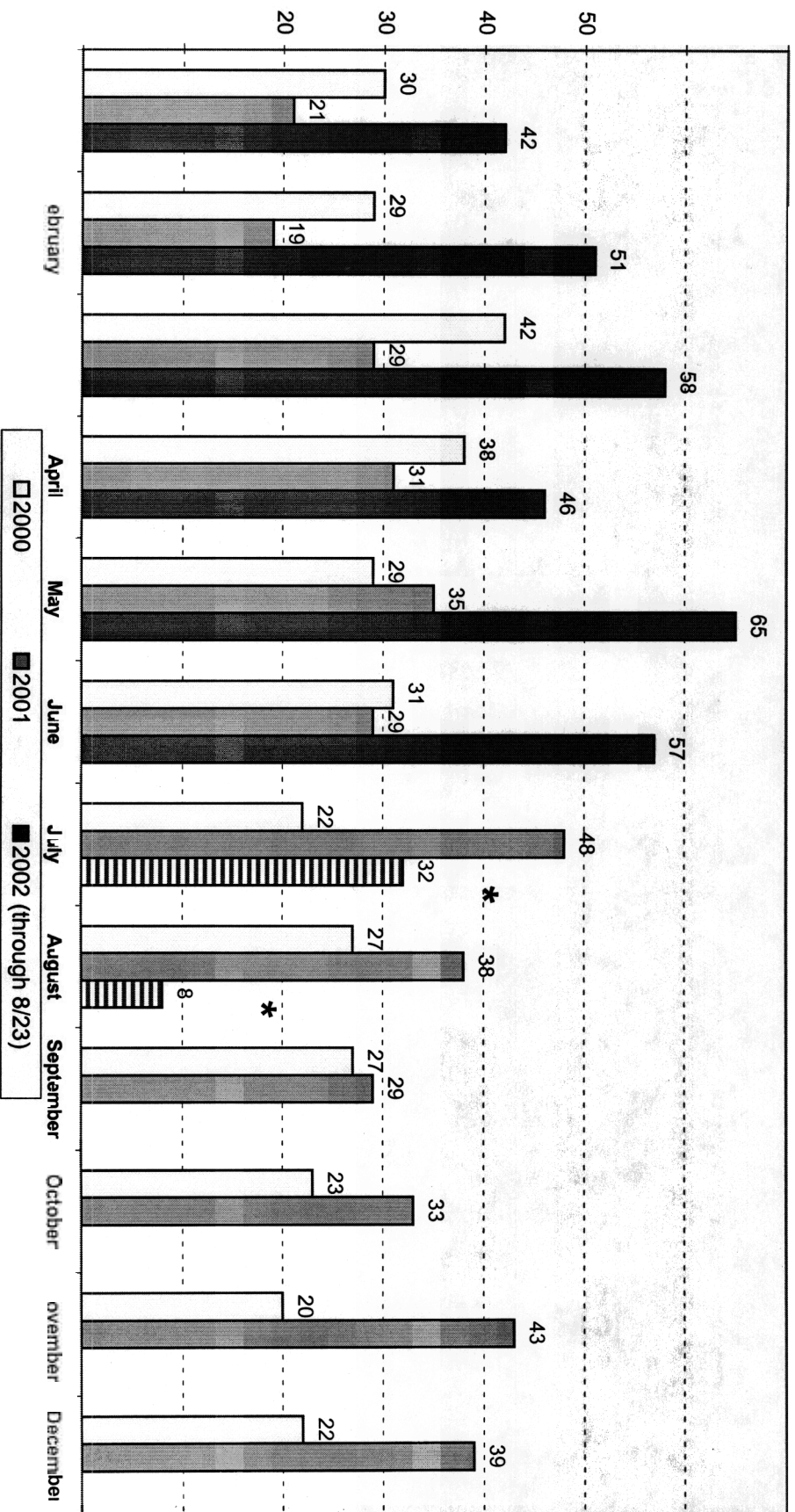
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#### Attachments

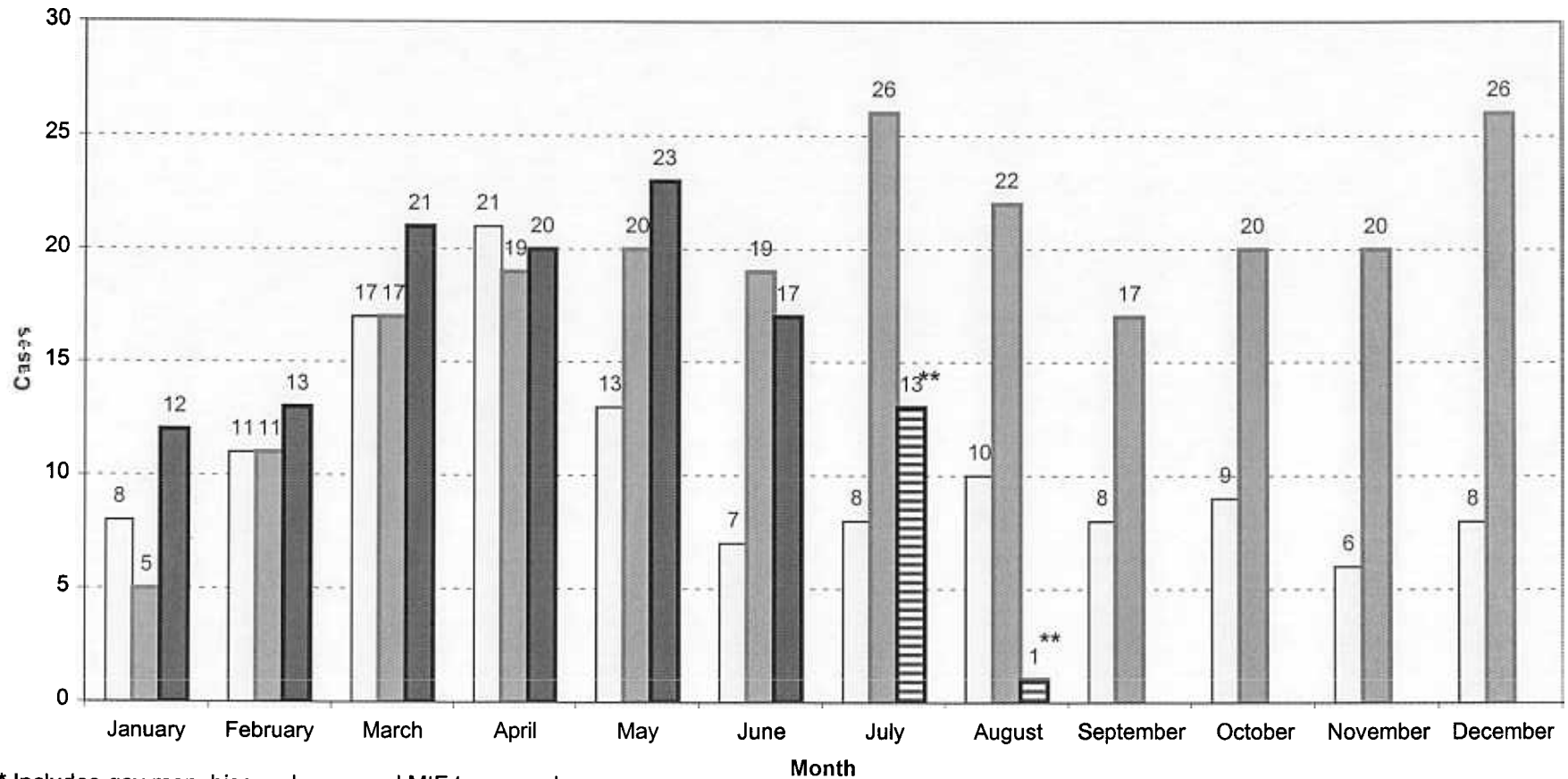
c: Chief Administrative Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors

# Attachment I

Total in Syph  
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 Year



**Total Early Syphilis Diagnosed Among MSM\* by Month and Year  
Los Angeles County, 2000 through 8/23/2002 (N=559)**



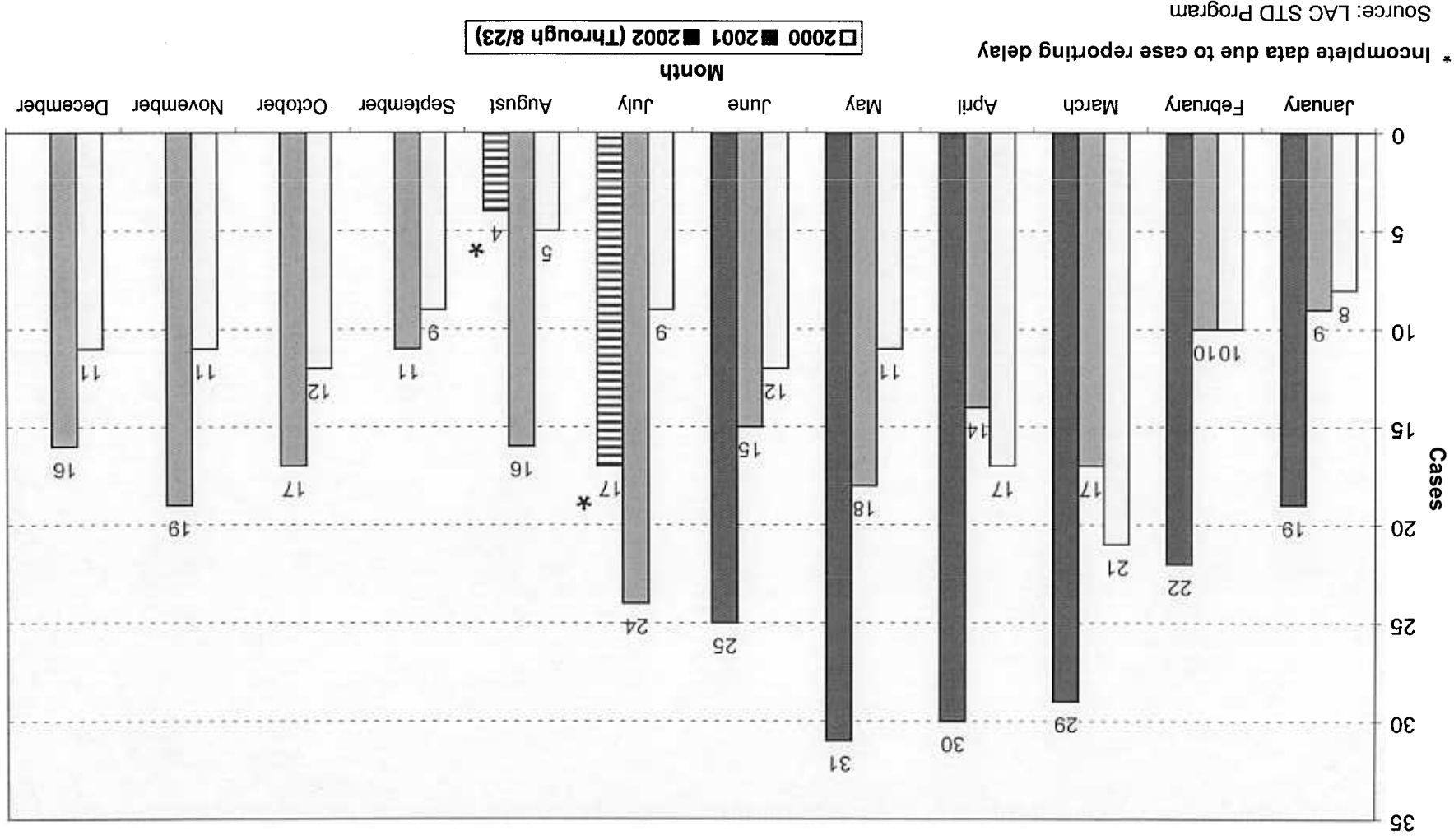
\* Includes gay men, bisexual men, and MtF transgenders

\*\* Incomplete data due to case reporting delay

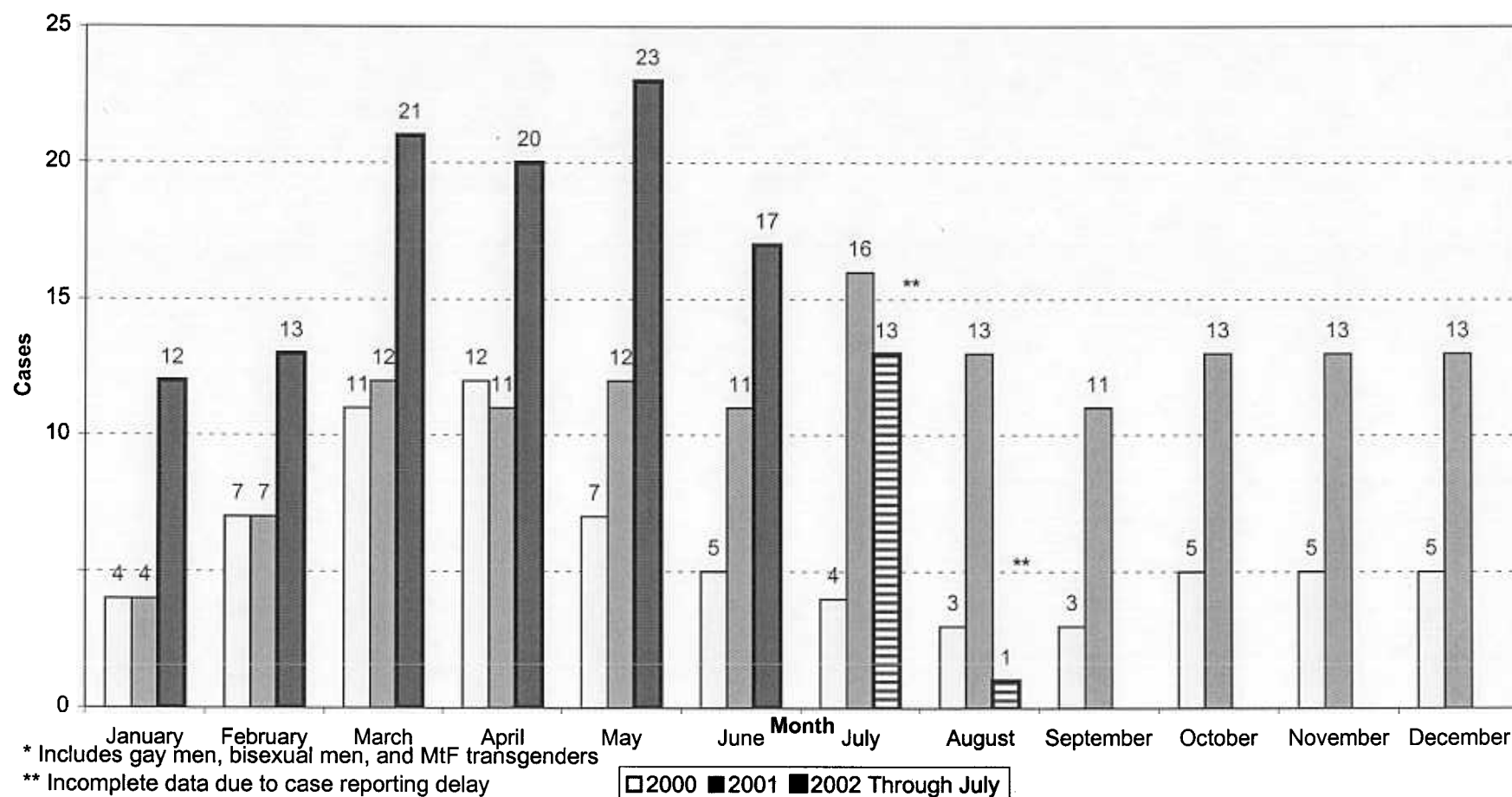
Source: LAC STD Program

□ 2000 ■ 2001 ■ 2002 to Date

# Primary and Secondary Syphilis Diagnosed by Month and Year Los Angeles County, 2000 - 8/23/2002 (N = 499)



**Primary and Secondary Syphilis Diagnosed Among MSM\* by Month and Year  
Los Angeles County, 2000 through 8/23/2002 (N=327)**

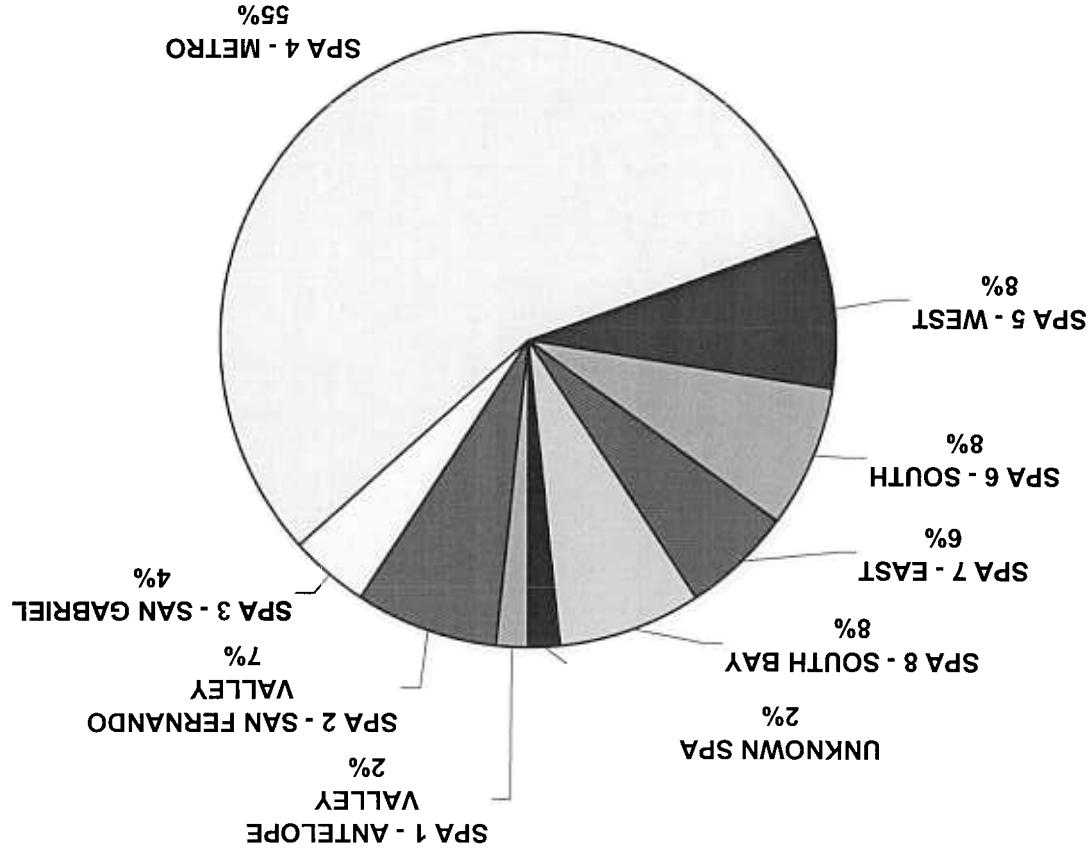


Source: LAC STD Program

LA STD Program / 2615 South Grand Avenue, Room 500 / Los Angeles, California 90007 / 213.744.5977 / cbemis@dhs.co.la.ca.us / 09.03.02



Primary and Secondary Syphilis by SPA of Residence, Los Angeles County 2002  
From 1/1/2002 through 8/23/2002 (N = 173)

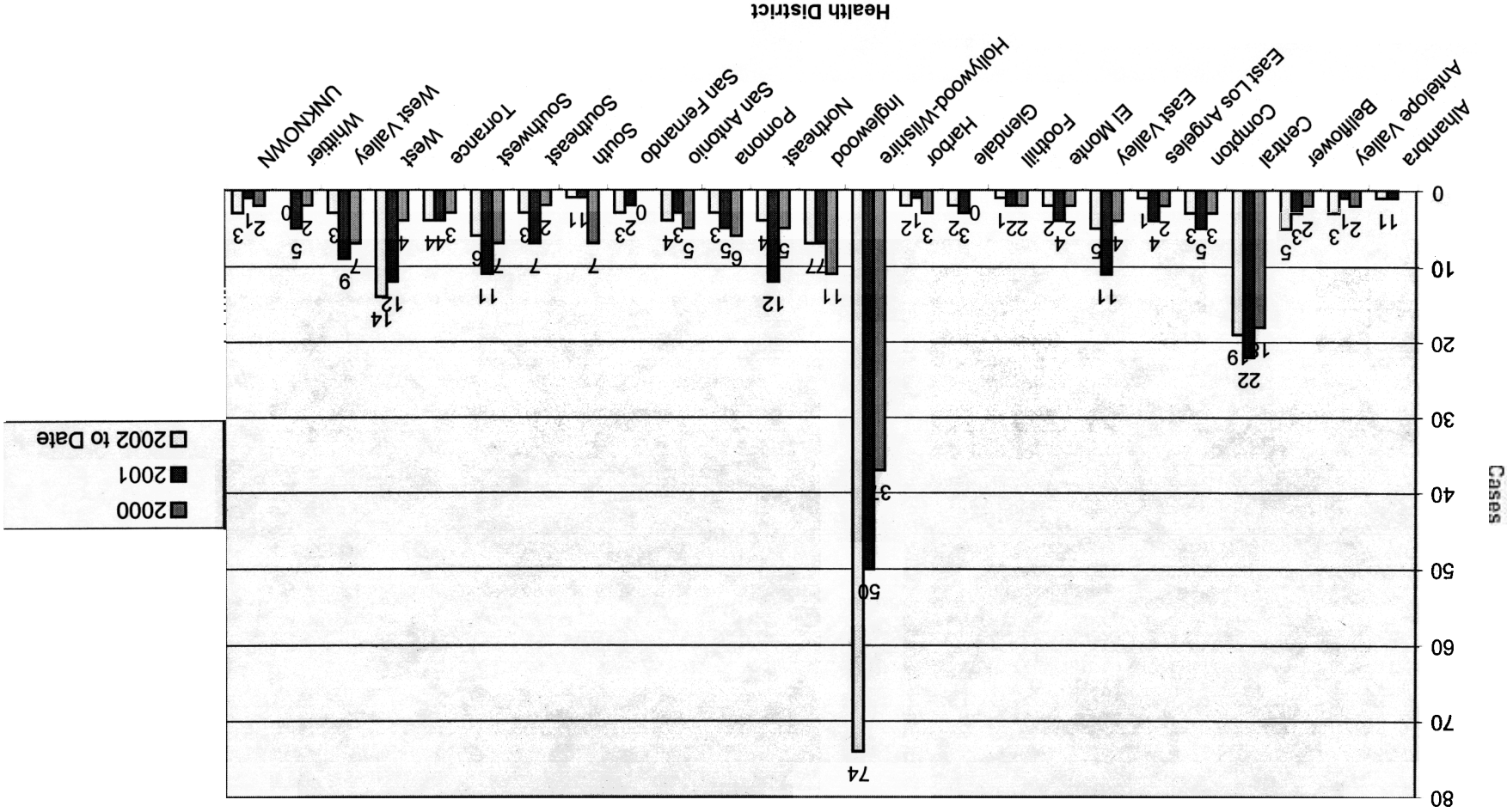


Source: LAC STD Program

LA STD Program / 2615 South Grand Avenue, Room 500 / Los Angeles, California 90007 / 213.744.5977 / cbermis@dhs.co.la.ca.us / 09.03.02

Source: LAC DHS STD Program

# Primary and Secondary Syphilis by Health District of Residence Los Angeles County, 1/1/2002 through 8/23/2002 (N = 499)



Source: LAC STD Program

LA STD Program / 2615 South Grand Avenue, Room 500 / Los Angeles, California 90007 / 213.744.5977 / cberniss@dhs.co.la.ca.us / 09.03.02

Source: LAC DHS STD Program

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Updated 08/29/2002

Updated 08/29/2002

Early Syphilis Cases by SPA of Residence

	2002 through 8/23			2001			2000		
	P&S	Early Latent	Early Total	P&S	Early Latent	Early Total	P&S	Early Latent	Early Total
SPA 1 - ANTELOPE VALLEY	3		3	1		1	2	2	4
SPA 2 - SAN FERNANDO VALLEY	13	22	35	25	22	47	11	19	30
	7	9	16	12	22	34	10	21	31
	97	90	187	84	85	169	60	69	129
	14	6	20	12	6	18	4	3	7
	13	20	33	24	31	55	19	48	67
	10	15	25	15	28	43	11	28	39
	13	17	30	12	11	23	17	7	24
	3	2	5	1	3	4	2	3	5
Total	173	181	354	186	208	394	136	200	336

Source: LAC DHS STD Program  
Updated 08/29/2002

Total Early Syphilis in Los Angeles County by Month

	2002 through 8/23			2001			2000		
	P&S	Early Latent	Total Early	P&S	Early Latent	Total Early	P&S	Early Latent	Total Early
	19	23	42	9	12	21	8		
	29	29	58	17	12				
	30	16	46	14	17				
	31	34	65	18	17	35	11		
	25	32	57	15	14	29	12		
	17	15	32	24	24	48	9		
	4	4	8	16	22	38	5		
	.	.	.	11	18	29	9		
	.	.	.	17	16	33			
	.	.	.	19	23	43			
December	177	182	186	208	394	136	204	340	

Source: LAC DHS STD Program  
Updated 08/29/2002

Early Syphilis Cases among Men Who Have Sex With Men (MSM) and Men Who Have Sex With Men and Women (MSM/W)\* in Los Angeles County, by Month

	2002 through 8/23			2001			2000		
	P&S	Early Latent	Total Early	P&S	Early Latent	Total	P&S	Early Latent	Total
	Total			Total			Total		
January	12	14	26	4	1	5	4	4	8
February	13	11	24	7	4	11	7	4	11
March	21	17	38	12	5	17	11	6	17
April	20	8	28	11	8	19	12	9	21
May	23	14	37	12	8	20	7	6	13
June	17	11	28	11	8	19	5	2	7
July	13	5	18	16	10	26	4	4	8
August	1	1	2	13	9	22	3	7	10
September	.	.	.	11	6	17	3	5	8
October	.	.	.	13	7	20	5	4	9
November	.	.	.	13	7	20	5	1	6
December	.	.	.	13	13	26	5	3	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>126</b>

\*Includes gay men, bisexual men, and male to female transgenders  
Source: LAC DHS STD Program  
Updated 08/29/2002